

A PLACE TO STAY

Phil Lewis

A Ghost Story

Many of the world's favourite songs have very few lyrics that tell a story. I have had to leave out very well-known songs, because the lyrics don't say anything (obviously – the music does the talking). On the other hand – some songs are very story specific, leaving little room to manoeuvre.

There are times when the lyrics are represented out of order. This is purely to enhance the story, but still including all the lyrics.

Most love songs are song in the first person. To translate, we would have too many narrative stories. So, in some instances, I have told the story by third party, although the original song was presented as first party.

In most instances the repeat chorus is not reflected as a repeat story line. The chorus is represented only once as part of the story.

This e-book is not intended to change the meaning of the lyrics, nor suggest a different interpretation for the songs. There is no intention to 'second guess' the writers/artists. It is purely for entertainment. It is more....if the song writer had read one of the stories, their famous song may have been the result.

I hope you enjoy the read. If you have any suggestions of popular songs that may be made into a short story, please contact me at: publications@phil-lewis.net. There may be a second e-book in the future.

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A PLACE TO STAY

I knew I was getting tired when I felt my eyes drooping. The wheel was light under my hand and the music seemed to fade from my hearing. I turned the volume up on the CD and let Shania Twain fill the darkened cab.

The white lines on the road seemed to pulse with their own hypnotic rhythm, the dark black top of Highway 101 stretched for a thousand miles or more ahead of me. But all I could see of it was the tiny portion lit by my six headlights. I brought the rig back to the centre of the inside lane. I checked my mirrors and saw a few lights behind me and few more way ahead of me. I was getting too tired.

I wound the window down and felt the breeze hurry in. It was cool as it whipped by my head. It had the scent of the desert, filling the cab with its dusty essences. My hair had grown too long again and it flapped around my face. I closed the window and turned up the air-con. I needed to shiver to stay awake.

I waited for the next road sign and saw it up ahead. I eased down to sixty and saw the signs for food and accommodation. Both were tempting, but I wanted to press on. The sign flashed by and I crept up to seventy-five. Lights glowed up ahead and I welcomed the change of scenery.

I cruised by the small strip, filled with the usual fast food franchises and the small motels. In my dazed state I imagined I could smell the burgers, fries and Mexican food mixing with the hot evening air. My stomach responded and I knew I was getting very near to giving in. The map lay beside me and I traced the route with my finger. I reckoned on another three hours of travelling before I reached home. Dana would be waiting and I knew in my heart I was not going to make it before she went to bed.

I reached for my cellular phone and dialled the number. She answered and I grinned as I spoke to her. She knew what was about to happen, as it had happened many times before. She saved me the problem of explaining, telling me not to overdo it, rest up for the night. There was always tomorrow morning. I told her I loved her and reluctantly broke the connection. Now I had to find somewhere to stay.

I've slept in my cab before, but never really slept well. I needed a cheap hotel, or motel. I had no budget for this stop-over and it was near the end of the month. I had about twenty bucks on me and an overloaded credit card. It just had to be cheap.

The road ahead was dark again. No food stops or motels along here. It would be an hour before the next strip. I could turn back, but I was even too tired for that. I would take the next turn off, no matter what. It was fifteen minutes later when the sign loomed up out of the dark. I signalled and let the speed slide off the rig. I slowed right down. There were no lights along this stretch of the highway. I had certainly made the right choice - not! But any longer and I would've been asleep at the wheel.

By the time I could read the sign I felt disappointment surge up inside me. It was a tiny faded and broken metal sign. I could just make out what it said, "Hotel Aztlán next right. - 2 miles." It would have to do. I eased along the road until a small turn-off marker showed and I eased the heavy rig on to the small and uneven road. I checked the milometer and counted off the yards.

I was getting fretful and angry. The counter said six miles. I must have missed the hotel. I was sure I hadn't, there was nothing on this road. No turn-offs, no houses - nothing. I was sure I hadn't missed it. I was not looking forward to driving back along this dark and difficult road. I just had to keep going until I could find a gap big enough to turn the big rig around on such a small track.

Despite the rolling of the rig my eyes were getting really heavy. I felt sure I'd have to park up and sleep where I was. I was fighting to stay awake. Ten miles. Up ahead I thought I saw a light. Dim, but it was the first sign of habitation I'd seen for ten miles. At least I could ask where the hell I was.

The building was dark against the black sky. It seemed to have a single light from a ground floor room. I eased the rig into the long curving drive, halted and parked up.

It was good to stretch my legs as I locked the cab door and eased my shoulders. The night was black, no stars or moon. The warm breeze drew aromas from the fields and livestock somewhere out in the dark. I began to sweat. I would have had to almost feel my way to the front of the building if I didn't have a flashlight. I heard a creaking and flashed my torch ahead of me. I saw a sign swinging about me. In faded letters it read, Hotel Aztlán. All this way and it looked closed.

It was worth seeing if anyone was up, and at least I could sleep in the cab. But I would like some food first. I walked to the porch and tried the door. It was locked. I flashed the torch around until I found a bell pull. Hesitantly, I gave it a jerk. Distantly I heard a bell ring. It sounded more like a mission bell than a doorbell. Apart from the brief noise, all was silent.

The door was solid wood and so I couldn't see if there was any movement inside. I was becoming convinced there was no one at home and the hotel was permanently closed. I was resigning myself to a night in the cab when the door opened silently. I hadn't heard any locks or bolts being drawn. It was pitch black inside, but I could just make out a figure at the door.

Whoever it was remained silent until I said, "I'm sorry to bother you. But is this a hotel? I'd like a room for the night. If possible," I finished lamely.

A flame flared and dazzled me for a moment. As my eyes readjusted I could see a candle had been lit and a young and very attractive woman was on the other side of it. As I watched, a smile spread across her pretty face. It seemed to come alive.

"You'd better come in then." Her voice was soft and gentle. She backed into the hallway and after a moment's hesitation, I followed her.

For the first time I felt apprehension. I suddenly realised my position. I was all alone in the countryside with no one knowing where I was. Even I didn't know! This place looked closed and here I was trying to stay the night. What kind of a night would I have here!

I stopped and was about to excuse myself and head for the truck when she touched my arm. The touch was so gentle and feminine it made me look down at her hands. The skin was almost translucent and incredibly smooth.

"This way, please. I'll need you to register."

She pulled on my arm and I felt myself drawn to her. The smile was there and it held my attention. We walked through a doorway and all I could see was the glow of the candle, her beautiful face and finally a desk where a pen lay on the white empty paper of the register book.

"I'm sorry about the power cut. Just temporary we hope. Just the one night?"

Her eyes were fixed to mine. She smiled and it looked all the world like she was trying to seduce me. I was taken aback and my hand shook as I signed my name and address.

"How much is the room?" I asked, looking back into those dark, startling eyes.

"We can't charge you if there's no electricity. It's your lucky night."

Her eyes never left mine, the smile grew wider. I smiled back.

"Any other guests here? Tonight?"

She nodded and for the first time looked away. "A few. All regulars. Since they built the highway, no one comes near us anymore. Only a matter of time now before we're closed for business. They're all in the communal room. I'll take you through and introduce you. They'll love a new face."

I started to say I just wanted to get to bed when she moved away, leaving me in the dark. I had to follow her.

She waited by a large dark wooden door and then opened it. The room was heavy with smoke, lit with many candles. This must be the room I could see from the road. I entered into near silence. People were sitting or standing, just staring until I walked in. Slowly, all eyes turned towards me. An old phonograph was in the corner, the turntable still spinning, the needle resting at the end of a record. The hissing was the only noise in the room.

It was dark and eerie. The flickering candles moved shadows across the walls, revealing and hiding objects, paintings, books and some items too indistinct to recognise.

“We have a guest for the night. His name is.....?”

“Mike. Call me Mike. Nice to meet you all.”

Several people nodded and some smiled. They all had a soulful expression on their faces, which was slowly changing to interest. In one corner, shrouded in shadows, I saw a woman staring at me and she looked to be the youngest there. Her eyes locked on to mine and I felt a chill down my spine.

I turned back to my host and almost whispered, “Is there any chance I could get something to eat?”

She nodded and said, “I will see if the kitchen’s still open.”

“I’d like it in my room.....please.” But she had gone, closing the door behind her. I turned to face the silent crowd.

I jumped as I felt a touch on my back. I turned to see an old man grinning at me. His mouth was black, without teeth or visible tongue, his clothes old and frayed. But there was no smell. I expected him to smell of decay, or human body odor. But there was no smell at all from the room. Not even from the candles.

“It’s nice to see a new face. We hope you enjoy your stay.”

“Yes,” added another behind me. I turned. “You are very welcome, Mike.” This time a young woman whose face was pale and looked very ill. Her long flowing evening gown had seen better days. It was almost diaphanous, revealing her body beneath, which looked almost as transparent.

“Thank you,” was all I could say. I just wanted to get to my room.

From the other side of the door I could hear people talking too. It sounded like “Nice to meet you,” and, “We hope you have a pleasant stay.” But some of the voices were muffled, sounding distant. I wanted to reply, but could not clearly see the people greeting me.

An old lady was peering closely at me. “This is a very nice hotel. You’ll love it here. Do you dance?” Her smile was hopeful. She too was wearing a ball gown and had pearls around her neck. Her earrings glittered and could be real diamonds.

I shook my head, “I’m afraid not.”

“Then we’ll teach you.” Her smile showed rows of blackened teeth. Fortunately she turned away to talk to somebody else.

I turned to see two women peering intently at me. They looked like sisters and were once very attractive women, but their faces seemed lined and shrunken. The heavy makeup they wore didn’t hide their age.

“Are you staying for a long while?” one asked. I shook my head.

“There’s plenty of room here,” the other contributed.

I tried to smile, not looking directly into their vacant eyes. “I know. I’ve been told.”

The second woman added, “Even at peak season.”

I felt a presence by my side. I looked round to see the woman from the corner shadows. Up close she was very attractive. In her late twenties and without the translucent skin the other guests were showing. It must be the candles that made everyone look so....old. But she was very young and healthy looking. Her eyes were steady and unblinking. They were dark blue and looked clear and bright. She wore an evening gown that shimmered in the yellow light. The pattern looked very early 1900's. It appeared to glow from within like a Tiffany lamp and she moved with a grace as if she was dancing, the images twisting and swirling as she moved.

"Hello....Mike."

"Hi."

"Welcome to the Hotel Aztlán. We hope your stay will beexciting." She too had that look of lust in her eyes. "We're all....friends, here." She waved her hand towards the garden door and to the three young men standing staring into the room, their faces lit by the candles inside. They looked vacant and sad.

She hurried over to the doors and flung them open. The draft of warm air felt reassuring that I was still in a world existing outside of this room. She put her hands around two of the men's shoulders and pulled them into the room. She kissed both men on the lips and smiled directly at me.

Behind her I could see more handsome young men approaching from the garden. They drifted from the black of night to the golden light of the candles, each face serious, with eyes only for the femme fatale in their midst. She delivered attention on them all and smiled back at me.

"These are my friends. I'll introduce you to each of them later."

There was not going to be a 'later'. I had decided to leave.

"My name is Mercedes. Named after the Greek heroine. Do you like to dance?"

I shook my head, turning to look for the door.

"We do."

When I looked back she was winding up the old phonograph, still staring directly at me. As she lowered the needle on the record it began to hiss loudly. Instantly there was a young man beside her. Without removing her locked stare at me, she encircled him with her arms and they began to dance.

As they spun and moved to the slow rhythm, she bent backwards elegantly, never taking her eyes off mine. I watched in fascination, unable to move or blink. From the corner of my eyes I saw the other ladies moving towards their partners and the dance migrated out into the courtyard.

For some, it seemed the dance or the music held memories. Some smiled and some looked very sad. One of the older ladies was crying freely, tears streaking her cheeks, but she was smiling. The heat was becoming overbearing. I could smell the warm bodies giving off new heat with the dancing. I forced myself to look away as I moved to the door. I had to get back to my truck and drive away from this most weird of places.

As I reached for the handle, the door opened silently and a man stood before me. He was dressed in dinner suit, as if a waiter, and looked directly at me.

"Would you like to order a meal, sir?"

I shook my head and said, "I've changed my mind. Perhaps another time."

"Cook has stayed behind especially for you sir. Your order?" The voice was emotionless and yet expectant.

I stammered, "Steak? You have steak and fries?" He nodded. "How long will it take?"

I was playing for time. I just needed to get out of there.

“Just a few minutes, sir. Would you like a drink before your meal?”

“Sure. Whisky. No water.”

“I’m sorry, sir. We don’t have any.”

“Wine then. Red in preference.”

“By drink, I meant non-alcoholic. We lost our license many years ago. There was a rumpus here during Woodstock week. The sheriff still hasn’t forgiven us and won’t grant a license. I do apologise. A soda, perhaps?”

“That is a long time. Yes. Soda’s fine.”

“Thank you, sir. Please relax with the other guests. The evening has only just begun.”

I turned to see the party in full swing. People dancing silently in and out of the room. The record scratching its way to the end of the waltz. Several called out to me and invited me to join in. Their voices sounding faint, even though they were only feet away from me. Their age must be the reason their voices were so weak. They mostly looked frail and not long for this earth.

By the time I’d turned back, the waiter had gone and the door was shut. I reached for the handle and it opened again, silently. The hostess I’d met first stood before me, still with that weird smile. Her eyes looked into mine and slid to the dancers behind me.

“They’re really getting into it now,” she said quietly.

I hesitated, but couldn’t resist a look behind me. The dancing was getting more frenzied and I could hear them calling to each other. More were laughing now, some still crying.

“They’ll go on until dawn. They’re celebrating your arrival. Our first new guest in some time. I can’t see any of us getting much sleep tonight.”

“I’m sorry, but I’ve just remembered I’m supposed to be somewhere else tonight. Sorry if I’ve caused you any inconvenience. I’ll see myself out.”

“They’ll be disappointed. The party’s for you.”

I shook my head, “I’m sorry.”

“Come, I’ll show you to your room.” She gripped my arm, her fingers light against my bare arm. She pulled me towards the door, the candle billowing with the movement. She pulled me through and I could hear the chorus of disappointment from the dancers. They were calling for me to return. Their voices grew faint as we reached the stairs. She was pulling me so quickly I had to be careful where I trod. She had the advantage of the light, while I was still in the dark. The revelers were on to a foxtrot and I could hear the excitement in their distant voices below as we hurried up the stairs.

I tried to resist without appearing rude. She ignored my every effort. We stood before a closed door and her eyes sparkled. “My room,” she said breathlessly.

“I really must go,” I said. “My daughter’s expecting me.”

“Call her later. Make up an alibi. Stay the night. Or even a few days. It’ll be worth it, I promise.”

She threw open the door and pulled me inside the room. It was furnished with heavy tapestries that looked hundreds of years old. Candles burned on wrought iron stands, their flicker spreading shadows in a wild dance from the warm air let in by the open door.

I look up, following her gaze and saw the huge mirror on the ceiling. The bed was wide and the top bedspread pulled back revealing clean white sheets. By the side of the bed, on an ornate stand, rested a

silver bucket. The top of a champagne bottle poked its neck over the top. So much for no alcohol. Now I was tempted.

The thought hit me hard. This was a brothel. She was plying her trade as a hooker. “No. I can’t do this. I must get home. Now.”

Her eyes flashed anger, but the weird smile remained.

“Okay,” she said crisply. “Your room’s this way.” She swept out of the room and I followed to tell her I was going back downstairs. As I stepped into the corridor she had opened another door and dragged me to look inside.

“The Master’s Room.”

“We have rooms for all occasions. Choose which one you like. There’s something here for everyone. While we’re here, we must make the best of it.”

I felt I had to look inside the dark room. There was a table in its centre, with two low burning candles. Around the table sat four men. They were clearly drunk to the point of stupefaction. They were trying to eat a meal with just knives. With horror I realised the food was still moving on their plates. They made ineffectual attempts to trap the animals, but the rodents, or whatever they were trying to eat, were still writhing. Like me, trying to get out of this hell hole.

I spun round to tell her and noticed the smile was fixed as she stared at me. This was the last straw for me and I brushed past her, feeling a light grasp on my arm which I shook off. I stumbled blindly towards where I thought the stairs were, the dim illumination of her candle just giving enough light for me to find the top step. I used the banisters as a guide as I hurried to the bottom. I could just make out the front door by the light from the ballroom. I raced to the handle and jerked. It was locked.

Something held me still. There was a silence. The music had stopped. The voices were silent as I turned slowly to look behind me. A tall thin man stood waiting. He was dressed in some kind of uniform. He looked like a doorman, or an usher.

“May I help you, sir?”

“Let me out,” my voice trembling with anger and frustration.

“I’m afraid that won’t be possible, sir.”

“What!”

“You’ve already checked in, sir. You cannot leave now.”

“What! What on earth are you on about?”

“Please relax. We are here to ensure you enjoy everything the Hotel Aztlán has to offer you. Music and dancing. Being entertained by a beautiful lady. Dining with gentlemen. Or just enjoying the peace, tranquillity and quiet ambience of the rest rooms. But cancel your reservation – you cannot.”

I was a good deal bigger than him and used my weight to push him aside. He didn’t resist, but his lips curled in what represented a smile. The handle was unmoving and the door would not budge. I turned and heard movement in the darkness. The guests were coming from the ballroom, silently and in the dark. I could hear their breathing, but their voices were silent.

The only sound was a bell tolling. The same mission bell sound I’d heard earlier. By the faint light I could see movement now. They were drawing ever closer. Closer.

With a shock, I woke up.

I felt the familiar grip of the steering wheel of my rig and the hum of the tyres. I shook myself awake and looked up. With a heart-stopping wash of fear I saw I had run off the road and was careening across the

median. I jammed both feet on the brake and the wheels locked and the truck slewed sideways. It was grinding to a halt, but was cresting the slight rise and gliding on to the dark black top of the opposite carriageway.

I caught a flash of headlights and heard the screaming tyres as something hit me head on. Everything went black.

I don't know how long I'd been out, but when I awoke it was pitch black. A light flared before my eyes and behind it was a face I recognised. It had a weird smile. Right then I knew I'd never see Dana again.

Please read on.....

What was the song?

Hotel California, by the Eagles.

Author's Notes:

1. This story was inspired by the lyrics of Hotel California by the Eagles. For Hotel California the Eagles said they just sat down and came up with a whole bunch of random lines, picked the best ones, put them into some sort of order that sounded good, and that was that!
2. People have been trying to come up with other, more rational, explanations since!
3. **Aztlán** is another name for California and north-western Mexico.
4. **Colitis** is a form of Mexican food.
5. **Woodstock** was in 1969.
6. **Captain** is another name for Head Waiter.

Here are the actual lyrics on which this story is based:

HOTEL CALIFORNIA

(Written by: Don Henley/Glenn Frey/Don Felder)

*On a dark desert highway, cool wind in my hair
Warm smell of colitas, rising up through the air
Up ahead in the distance, I saw a shimmering light
My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim
I had to stop for the night*

*There she stood in the doorway;
I heard the mission bell
And I was thinking to myself,
'this could be heaven or this could be hell'
Then she lit up a candle and she showed me the way*

*There were voices down the corridor,
I thought I heard them say...*

*Welcome to the hotel california
Such a lovely place
Such a lovely face
Plenty of room at the hotel california
Any time of year, you can find it here*

*Her mind is tiffany-twisted, she got the Mercedes bends
She got a lot of pretty, pretty boys, that she calls friends*

*How they dance in the courtyard, sweet summer sweat.
Some dance to remember, some dance to forget*

*So I called up the captain,
'please bring me my wine'
He said, 'we haven't had that spirit here since nineteen sixty nine'*

*And still those voices are calling from far away,
Wake you up in the middle of the night
Just to hear them say...*

*Welcome to the hotel california
Such a lovely place
Such a lovely face
They livin' it up at the hotel california
What a nice surprise, bring your alibis*

*Mirrors on the ceiling,
The pink champagne on ice*

And she said 'we are all just prisoners here, of our own device'

*And in the master's chambers,
They gathered for the feast*

*The stab it with their steely knives,
But they just can't kill the beast*

*Last thing I remember, I was
Running for the door
I had to find the passage back
To the place I was before*

*'relax,' said the night man,
We are programmed to receive.
You can checkout any time you like,
But you can never leave!*

Continued.....

WHERE WERE THE CLUES?

On a dark desert highway, cool wind in my hair

The white lines on the road seem to pulse with their own hypnotic rhythm, the **dark black top of Highway 101** stretched for a thousand miles or more ahead of me. I wound the window down and felt the **breeze hurry in. It was cool as it whipped by my head.** It was scented, filling the cab with its dusty essences. My hair had grown too long again and it flapped around my face. I closed the window and turned up the air-con. I needed to shiver to stay awake.

Warm smell of colitas, rising up through the air

I cruised by the small strip, filled with the usual fast food franchises and the small motels. In my dazed state I imagined I could smell the **burgers, fries and Mexican food mixing with the hot evening air.** My stomach responded and I knew I was getting very near to giving in. The map lay beside me and I traced the route with my finger. I reckoned on another three hours of travelling before I reached home. Dana would be waiting and I knew in my heart I was not going to make it before she went to bed.

Up ahead in the distance, I saw a shimmering light

I waited for the next road sign and saw it up ahead. I eased down to sixty and saw the signs for food and accommodation. Both were tempting, but I wanted to press on. The sign flashed by and I crept up to seventy-five. **Lights glowed up ahead** and I welcomed the change of scenery.

My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim I had to stop for the night

Despite the rolling of the rig my **eyes were getting really heavy. I felt sure I'd have to park up and sleep where I was.** I was fighting to stay awake. Ten miles. Up ahead I thought I saw a light. **Dim**, but it was the first sign of habitation I'd seen for ten miles. At least I could ask where the hell I was.

There she stood in the doorway;

A flame flared and dazzled me for a moment. As my eyes readjusted I could see a candle had been lit and **a young and very attractive woman was on the other side of it.** As I watched her, a smile spread across her pretty face. It seemed to come alive.

I heard the mission bell

It was worth seeing if anyone was up, and at least I could sleep in the cab. But I would like some food first. I walked to the porch and tried the door. It was locked. I flashed the torch around until I found a bell pull. Hesitantly, I gave it a jerk. Distantly I heard a bell ring. It sounded more like **a mission bell** than a doorbell. Apart from the brief noise, all was silent.

And I was thinking to myself, 'this could be heaven or this could be hell'

For the first time I felt apprehension. ***I suddenly realised my position.*** I was all alone in the countryside with no one knowing where I was. Even I didn't know! This place looked closed and here I was trying to stay the night. ***What kind of a night would I have here!***

Then she lit up a candle and she showed me the way

A flame flared and dazzled me for a moment. As my eyes readjusted I could see ***a candle had been lit*** and a young and very attractive woman was on the other side of it. As I watched her, a smile spread across her pretty face. It seemed to come alive.

She pulled on my arm and I felt myself drawn to her. The smile was there and it held my attention. ***We walked through a doorway*** and all I could see was the glow of the candle, her beautiful face and finally a desk where a pen lay on the white empty paper of the register book.

There were voices down the corridor, I thought I heard them say...

From the ***other side of the door I could hear people talking*** too. ***It sounded like*** "Nice to meet you," and, "We hope you have a pleasant stay." But some of the voices were muffled, sounding distant. I wanted to reply, but could not see the people greeting me.

Welcome to the hotel California

"Welcome to the Hotel Aztlán. We hope your stay will beexciting." She too had that look of lust in her eyes. "We're all....friends, here." She waved her hand towards the garden door and to the three young men standing staring into the room. Their faces lit by the candles inside. They looked vacant and sad.

Such a lovely place

An old lady was peering closely at me. "***This is a very nice hotel.*** You'll love it here. Do you dance?" Her smile was hopeful. She too was wearing a ball gown and had pearls around her neck. Her earrings glittered and could be real diamonds.

Such a lovely face

I felt a presence by my side. I looked round to see the woman from the corner shadows. Up close ***she was very attractive.*** In her late twenties and without the translucent skin the other guests were showing. It must be the candles that made everyone look so.....old. But she was very ***young and healthy looking.*** Her eyes were steady and unblinking. They were dark blue and looked clear and bright. She wore an evening gown that shimmered in the yellow light. It appeared to glow from within and she moved with a grace as if she was dancing.

Plenty of room at the hotel California Any time of year, you can find it here

"Are you staying for a long while?" one asked. I shook my head.

"There's plenty of room here," the other contributed.

I tried to smile, not looking directly into their vacant eyes. "I know. I've been told."

The second woman added, ***"Even at peak season."***

Her mind is tiffany-twisted, she got the Mercedes bends

I felt a presence by my side. I looked round to see the woman from the corner shadows. Up close she was very attractive. In her late twenties and without the translucent skin the other guests were showing. It must be the candles that made everyone look so....old. But she was very young and healthy looking. Her eyes were steady and unblinking. They were dark blue and looked clear and bright. She wore an evening gown that shimmered in the yellow light. The pattern looked very early 1900's. It appeared to glow from within like a **Tiffany** lamp and she moved with a grace as if she was dancing, the images **twisting** and swirling as she moved.

"My name is **Mercedes**. Named after the Greek heroine. Do you like to dance?"

As they spun and moved to the slow rhythm, she **bent** backwards elegantly, never taking her eyes off mine. I watched in fascination, unable to move or blink. From the corner of my eyes I saw the other ladies moving towards their partners and the dance migrated out into the garden.

She got a lot of pretty, pretty boys, that she calls friends

Behind her I could see more **handsome young men** approaching from the garden. They drifted from the black of night to the golden light of the candles. Each face serious, with eyes only for the femme fatale in their midst. She delivered attention on them all and smiled back at me.

"**These are my friends**. I'll introduce you to each of them later."

How they dance in the courtyard, sweet summer sweat.

As they spun and moved to the slow rhythm, she bent backwards elegantly, never taking her eyes off mine. I watched in fascination, unable to move or blink. From the corner of my eyes I saw the other ladies moving towards their partners and the **dance migrated out into the courtyard**.

For some, it seemed the dance or the music held memories. One of the older ladies was crying freely, tears streaking her cheeks, but she was smiling. The heat was becoming unbearable. **I could smell the warm bodies giving off new heat** with the dancing. I forced myself to look away as I moved to the door. I had to get back to my truck and drive away from this most weird of places.

Some dance to remember, some dance to forget

For some, it seemed the **dance** or the music **held memories**. Some smiled and some **looked very sad**. One of the older ladies was crying freely, tears streaking her cheeks, but she was smiling. The heat was becoming unbearable. I could smell the warm bodies giving off new heat with the dancing. I forced myself to look away as I moved to the door. I had to get back to my truck and drive away from this most weird of places.

So I called up the captain, 'please bring me my wine'

As I reached for the handle the door opened silently and a man stood before me. He was **dressed in dinner suit, as if a waiter**, and looked directly at me.

"Would you like to order a meal, sir?"

"Just a few minutes, sir. Would you like a drink before your meal?"

“Sure. Whisky. No water.”

“I’m sorry sir. We don’t have any.”

“**Wine then.** Red in preference.”

He said, ‘we haven’t had that spirit here since nineteen sixty nine’

“By drink, I meant non-alcoholic. **We lost our license many years ago. There was a rumpus here during Woodstock week.** The sheriff still hasn’t forgiven us and won’t grant a license. I do apologise. A soda, perhaps?”

And still those voices are calling from far away,

“Come, I’ll show you to your room.” She gripped my arm, her fingers light against my bare arm. She pulled me towards the door the candle billowing with the movement. She pulled me through and I could hear the chorus of disappointment from the dancers. **They were calling for me to return. Their voices grew faint as we reached the stairs.** She was pulling me so quickly I had to be careful where I trod. She had the advantage of the light, while I was still in the dark. The revelers were on to a foxtrot and I could hear the excitement in their distant voices below as we hurried up the stairs.

Wake you up in the middle of the night

“They’ll go on until dawn. They’re celebrating your arrival. Our first new guest in some time. **I can’t see any of us getting much sleep tonight.**”

Just to hear them say...

“Come, I’ll show you to your room.” She gripped my arm, her fingers light against my bare arm. She pulled me towards the door the candle billowing with the movement. She pulled me through and **I could hear the chorus of disappointment from the dancers.** They were calling for me to return. Their voices grew faint as we reached the stairs. She was pulling me so quickly I had to be careful where I trod. She had the advantage of the light, while I was still in the dark. The revelers were on to a foxtrot and I could hear the excitement in their distant voices below as we hurried up the stairs.

They livin’ it up at the hotel California

“Come, I’ll show you to your room.” She gripped my arm, her fingers light against my bare arm. She pulled me towards the door the candle billowing with the movement. She pulled me through and I could hear the chorus of disappointment from the dancers. They were calling for me to return. Their voices grew faint as we reached the stairs. She was pulling me so quickly I had to be careful where I trod. She had the advantage of the light, while I was still in the dark. **The revelers were on to a foxtrot and I could hear the excitement in their distant voices** below as we hurried up the stairs.

What a nice surprise, bring your alibis

“I really must go,” I said. “My daughter’s expecting me.”

“Call her later. **Make up an alibi.** Stay the night. Or even a few days. **It’ll be worth it,** I promise.”

***Mirrors on the ceiling,
The pink champagne on ice***

I look up, following her gaze and saw the ***huge mirror on the ceiling***. The bed was wide and the top bedspread pulled back revealing clean white sheets. By the side of the bed, on an ornate stand, rested a ***silver bucket. The top of a champagne bottle*** poked its neck over the top. So much for no alcohol. Now I was tempted.

And she said 'we are all just prisoners here, of our own device'

"We have rooms for all occasions. Choose which one you like. There's something here for everyone. ***While we're here, we must make the best of it.***"

And in the master's chambers,

"Okay," she said crisply. "Your room's this way." She swept out of the room and I followed to tell her I was going back downstairs. As I stepped into the corridor she had opened another door and dragged me to look inside.

"The Master's Room."

***They gathered for the feast
The stab it with their steely knives,
But they just can't kill the beast***

I felt I had to look inside the dark room. There was a table in its centre, with two low burning candles. ***Around the table sat four men***. They were clearly drunk to the point of stupefaction. ***They were trying to eat a meal*** and with horror I realised the food was still moving on their plates. ***They made ineffectual attempts to trap the animals, but the rodents, or whatever they were trying to eat, were still writhing*** like me, trying to get out of this hell hole.

***Last thing I remember, I was
running for the door***

I spun round to tell her and noticed the smile was fixed as she stared at me. This was the last straw for me and I brushed past her, feeling a light grasp on my arm which I shook off. I stumbled blindly towards where I thought the stairs were, the dim illumination of her candle just giving enough light for me to find the top step. ***I used the banisters as a guide as I hurried to the bottom. I could just make out the front door by the light from the ballroom. I raced to the handle and jerked. It was locked.***

***I had to find the passage back
to the place I was before***

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'relax,' said the night man,

Something held me still. There was a silence. The music had stopped. The voices were silent I turned slowly to look behind me. A tall thin man stood waiting. He was dressed in some kind of uniform. ***He looked like a doorman,*** or an usher.

"May I help you, sir?"

"Let me out," my voice trembling with anger and frustration.

"I'm afraid that won't be possible, sir."

"What!"

"You've already checked in, sir. You cannot leave now."

"What! What on earth are you on about?"

"Please relax. We are here to ensure you enjoy everything the Hotel Aztlán has to offer you. Music and dancing. Being entertained by a beautiful lady. Dining with gentlemen. Or just enjoying the peace, tranquillity and quiet ambience of the rest rooms. But cancel your reservation – you cannot."

We are programmed to receive.

"Please relax. ***We are here to ensure you enjoy everything the Hotel Aztlán has to offer you.*** Music and dancing. Being entertained by a beautiful lady. Dining with gentlemen. Or just enjoying the peace, tranquillity and quiet ambience of the rest rooms. But cancel your reservation – you cannot."

***You can checkout any time you like,
But you can never leave!***

"Please relax. We are here to ensure you enjoy everything the Hotel Aztlán has to offer you. Music and dancing. Being entertained by a beautiful lady. Dining with gentlemen. Or just enjoying the peace, tranquillity and quiet ambience of the rest rooms. ***But cancel your reservation – you cannot."***

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